“We Shall Be Monsters”: *Frankenstein* and the Ugliness of Enlightenment

[F]or a person who is altogether ugly in appearance, or of poor birth, or solitary and childless cannot really be characterized as happy.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b1-5.

I hate books.

Rousseau, *Emile*, *CW* 13:331.

Two hundred years ago, in January 1818, the first edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published anonymously in London [*F* 311, 334].[1] Over the next two centuries Shelley's "hideous progeny" [*F* 173] grew to mythic size, siring offspring in film and print, birthing the science fiction genre, and updating the story of Prometheus, which cautions us about the dangers of science and technology, of ambitious philanthropy, and of 'playing god.'

Here is a sketch of Shelley's story. A young chemistry student named Victor Frankenstein makes and animates a monster.[2] Horrified by his work, he abandons it, and the monster flees. A few months later, Frankenstein is called home by the murder of his youngest brother. He returns to see a household servant accused, tried, condemned, and executed for the crime; but he suspects that the monster is the real murderer. During a hike in the Alps, his suspicion is confirmed: the monster confronts him, tells his story, and demands that Frankenstein build him a companion.

To Frankenstein the monster's demand at first seems just, despite his crime. Frankenstein travels to England to do research and gather his materials. After several months, he nearly completes an artificial woman; but at the last moment he tears his work to pieces, fearing she will birth a species of monsters to war on humanity. Seeing this betrayal, the monster vows revenge and departs, leaving Frankenstein to return home. During his return he discovers that his friend Henry Clerval has also been murdered; he is accused of the crime and tried, but acquitted. Home at last, Frankenstein prepares to marry his childhood companion Elizabeth Lavenza, promising to share with her his dreadful secret once they are wed. The night of his wedding, he sends Elizabeth away in order to confront and fight the monster. But he has misunderstood the monster's vow: he hears two terrible screams, and Elizabeth is dead. Frankenstein vows revenge, and pursues the monster north.

Victor Frankenstein tells this story to an explorer named Robert Walton, whom he meets on the ice of the Arctic Ocean. Walton records the details, reporting some of them in letters to his sister in London. Though Frankenstein is close to catching the monster when Walton finds him, he is also near death. He is too weak to continue his pursuit, and once he has told his story he dies on Walton's ship. Soon afterward, Walton finds the monster crouching over Frankenstein's corpse. They speak briefly, then the monster exits the ship and disappears. Walton sails for London, bringing the story of Frankenstein and his monster back to society.

Many monsters have been assembled from the materials *Frankenstein* furnishes. Mine is animated by what strikes me as Mary Shelley's chief question in the novel: is enlightenment good? This monster's homogeneous parts are ugliness, solitude, reading, science, ambition, philanthropy, beauty, family, and nature. To learn how to mix these materials, I will trace the four enlightenments depicted in Shelley's novel: those of the monster, of Frankenstein, of Walton, and of Shelley herself. These enlightenments make up the four proper parts of this lecture, parts neither proportionate in size, nor ordered as in the novel. I mean to build this monster from the inside out.

Part One: The Enlightenment of the Monster

Enlightenment makes the monster a monster. So he tells Frankenstein on the alpine sea of ice. Abandoned by his maker, lacking other guidance, he is at first shaped only by his confused sensations. When he sees light, he closes his eyes; when he sees darkness, he feels pain, and opens his eyes again. When he wakes in Frankenstein's apartment, he feels cold, and grabs some clothes to cover himself. When he feels hot, he hides in a forest. Then there is hunger, which leads to berries, thirst, which leads to a stream, and fatigue, which leads to sleep.

At night, the dark and cold return, and he weeps in pain. But then he sees moonlight, feels pleasure, and wonders. All this happens mechanically in response to sensations. The monster's mind is empty of distinct ideas [*F* 68].

But soon, distinct ideas follow his distinct sensations. The monster finds a fire that some travelers have abandoned. Its warmth is pleasant, but it burns when he touches it [compare *CW* 2: 12 note *]. He learns to feed the fire, to fan it to life, and to cook nuts and roots over it [*F* 69]. But food is scarce, so he must abandon his fire to forage. This brings him to a shepherd's hut. The shepherd, seeing the monster, shrieks and flees, leaving behind his breakfast and another fire. The monster remembers this hut as a kind of paradise;[3] but hunger forces him to leave it too. He comes to a village, where signs of food draw him into a cottage. The terrified villagers assemble to repel him with a hail of missiles [*F* 70].

Now the monster suffers the first of three accidents. He hides in a hovel, improving it so that it shelters and conceals him, like the shepherd's hut. But this hovel happens to adjoin an inhabited cottage. This guarantees the monster a source of food and water; but it also allows him to observe the cottagers unseen [*F* 71-72]: a blind old man, a young man, and a young girl. They seem kind, sad, and poor, and their relations give him "sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature… a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food" [*F* 72]. This experience of beauty stops the monster from stealing their food; instead, he gathers wood for them while they sleep. He becomes an invisible family member. Noticing his benefactions, they call him "*wonderful*," and "*a good spirit*" [*F* 77; compare 65].

The monster also listens to his cottagers, and learns that they can communicate pleasure and pain through speech. Observing with care, he begins to acquire this "godlike science": the

old man is “father,” the young girl “Agatha” or “sister,” and the young man “son,” “brother,” or “Felix” [*F* 75]. But he also contrasts “the perfect forms” of his cottagers, “their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions,” with his own ugliness, which he first sees in a pool of water. Terrified by his own looks, the monster begins to call himself ‘monster’ [*F* 76].[4]

This, the monster tells Frankenstein, is the less moving part of his story, explaining how he became what he once was [*F* 77] – namely, good. His survival and flourishing do not require him to harm others: he is a vegetarian who will not steal food from those worse off [*F* 99].[5] He admires beauty and benevolence, wants to imitate them, and wants to be admired in return. The *more* moving part of his story, which tells how he became what he now is [*F* 77], begins when he learns how to read.

One day, a beautiful woman comes to the cottage. The monster hears that her name is Safie, a form of Sophie. At the very middle of the novel, then, Sophie comes to the abode of Felix and Agatha, that is, wisdom comes to the happy and the good. This moment is the peak of the monster’s life. Since Safie can neither speak nor write the cottagers’ language, Felix teaches her, and the monster listens in. He boasts to Frankenstein that he improved more rapidly than she did: he is a quicker study than wisdom herself [*F* 79]. Felix’s lessons are readings from a book of history, Volney’s *Ruins of Empires*,[6] followed by explanations. The monster wonders at the many stories of murder, and at humankind’s need for laws and governments. Vice and bloodshed disgust him, and when he hears of the fate of the native Americans, he feels sorrow [*F* 80]. He learns about “the strange system of human society” [*F* 80], based on property, social standing, and inequality. He learns about male and female, about the birth and growth of children, and about family. Since Felix and Agatha are brother and sister, and the old man is their father, it takes Safie’s arrival to teach the monster about sex.[7]

These lessons make the monster reflect. He lacks both social rank and riches, the only possessions human beings esteem. He admires beauty, but he is "hideously deformed and loathsome" [*F* 80]. He may not even be human; he has yet to see anyone like him. He has no family, and remembers nothing of his previous life. "I can not describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted on me," he says. "I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge," and knowledge "clings to the mind… like lichen on a rock" [*F* 81]. He wishes he could shake off thought and feeling, and return to his life of sensations in the woods. But he knows only death can release him from his sorrow: a fate he fears and does not understand.

Now a second accident befalls the monster.[8] While seeking food and wood in the forest, he finds copies of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the first volume of Plutarch's *Lives*, and Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*, all in the language he can read. He studies these books, taking each for a "true history" [*F* 87]. Reading Goethe, he judges Werther a divine being with a deep and honest character, wonders at his suicide for love, weeps at his death, and shares his opinions without understanding his fate.[9] This book throws the monster into "despondency and gloom" [*F* 86], and renews his sorrowful reflections.[10] Reading Plutarch, he finds "the histories of the first founders of the ancient republics," and learns "high thoughts," and "to admire and love the heroes of past ages" [*F* 86]. He prefers the peaceful lawgivers Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus to the violent founders Romulus and Theseus, but only by accident. Had he first observed humanity in the form of a young soldier, rather than of his cottagers, the monster tells Frankenstein, "I should have been imbued with different sensations" [*F* 87].[11] But reading *Paradise Lost* moves the monster most strongly, because it depicts situations similar to his own. Like Adam, the monster sees himself "apparently united by no link to any other being in existence" [*F* 87]; though unlike Adam, "no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts" [*F* 88]. Like Satan, he envies the

happiness of his cottagers [*F* 87]. About Eve's fall, the situation that most resembles his own, the monster is silent.

The monster also deciphers the journal pages he finds in a pocket of the clothes he grabbed from Frankenstein's apartment [*F* 87; compare 68]. They detail his "accursed origin," the "disgusting circumstances" that made his "odious and loathsome person" [*F* 88]. Frankenstein's notes also make the monster think of Adam and Satan. "God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image," he tells his maker, "but my form is a filthy type of your's, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested" [*F* 88].

Having tasted, through his reading, from the tree of knowledge, the monster quickly falls. He wants to become a visible member of his cottagers' family, so he decides to reveal himself to them [*F* 85]. Since his "unnatural hideousness" causes the horror he inspires, while his voice, "although harsh, [has] nothing terrible in it" [*F* 89; compare 69],[12] he plans to address himself first to the blind old man. He hopes the old man will defend him to the other cottagers, convey his admiration for them, and provoke their compassion, despite his looks [*F* 88]. When the old man is alone, the monster knocks, enters, and speaks with him. He argues sincerely that he is a victim of injustice, and throws himself on the old man's mercy, just as the cottagers come home. Seeing the monster, Agatha faints, Safie flees, Felix attacks, and the monster retreats to his hovel [*F* 91]. This reception makes the monster rage and despair. He declares "everlasting war against the human species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" [*F* 92]. To open hostilities he burns the cottagers' home, and sets off to find Frankenstein, to demand pity and justice [*F* 94].[13]

Now the monster suffers a third accident. Arriving in Frankenstein's home town, and pondering how to address his creator, he meets a small child. He thinks, "this little creature [is] unprejudiced, and [has] lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity" [*F* 96]. If he can educate the child to be his friend, he will not be alone. He seizes the child, who screams, calls him "monster," and threatens punishment from his father, "Monsieur Frankenstein" [*F* 96-97]. Hearing the name of his maker, the monster makes the child his first victim. He grasps his throat, and William Frankenstein is dead. When the monster finds a locket on William's body, he slips it unseen into the pocket of a nearby girl [*F* 97]. Soon enough this girl, Justine Moritz, is executed for the murder of Frankenstein's brother [*F* 44-58].[14]

This concludes the more moving part of the monster's story. Here he first refers to his own "malignity" [*F* 97]. These murders, he thinks, have completed his fall from goodness to wickedness. But while the hated name 'Frankenstein' provokes him to murder, he continues to hope for his maker's pity and justice. The monster's mere thought of Frankenstein is not enough to explain William's murder. A contributing cause must be William's revulsion at the monster's ugliness, which shows the monster that the horror he inspires is not learned, but natural.[15] And while the monster claims that "the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man" [*F* 97] taught him *how* to frame Justine Moritz, the portrait of Frankenstein's beautiful mother inside the locket teaches us *why* he frames her. He is ugly; the smiles of beautiful women are not for him. He is by nature cut off from human society.

Concluding his story, the monster thus demands of Frankenstein, "create a female for me" [*F* 98]. He insists it is Frankenstein's duty to comply, since a creator has a duty to make his creation happy; if Frankenstein does not comply, he will slaughter the rest of his family, as well as "thousands of others" [*F* 66].[16] Frankenstein's choice, he says, will determine whether he

remains wicked, or returns to his original goodness [*F* 66]. He sees these possibilities in terms of *Paradise Lost*: "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" [*F* 66]. Despite his fall, he is silent again about the resemblance of his story to Eve's. He can be Adam or Satan; he sees no third possibility.[17]

Frankenstein agrees with the monster about his duty [*F* 67].[18] But if he makes a female monster, he worries, "their joint wickedness might desolate the world" [*F* 98]. To reassure him, the monster promises he and his mate will quit human society. "It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world," he says, "but on that account we shall be more attached to one another" [*F* 99].[19] His words move Frankenstein to compassion, and he consents to make the monster a companion. He believes the monster's claim that his wickedness is due only to his solitude [*F* 100].[20] For his part, the monster does not touch Frankenstein's family again until Frankenstein changes his mind, and destroys his second creation [*F* 115-116].[21] Then the monster vows revenge, resumes killing, and drags Frankenstein to his death [*F* 152-154].

He kills because he is wicked, the monster claims; he is wicked because he is alone;[22] and he is alone because Frankenstein did not make him a companion. But he is also alone because he is ugly. *Can* a companion be made for him? Human beings naturally find him ugly [*F* 98], he thinks; he even finds himself ugly [*F* 76]. As Frankenstein realizes later, even a companion created for the monster will likely find him ugly [*F* 114];[23] and worse, soon we will see that such a companion will likely also *be* ugly.[24] The monster's hope for a companion is due to seeing himself as Adam in *Paradise Lost*, just as his later pursuit of revenge is due to seeing himself as Satan.[25] His reading has hidden other possibilities, and this will ruin his life. The monster is alone, and must be alone, not by Frankenstein's choice, but simply because he is ugly.[26] But why is he ugly?

Part Two: The Enlightenment of Victor Frankenstein

Enlightenment also makes Frankenstein a monster. So he tells Walton aboard ship on the sea of ice. "No youth could have passed more happily than mine" [*F* 20], he says. His parents are tender, his father as indulgent and as little dictatorial as possible [*F* 19, 105]. Yet his family is strangely constituted. Victor's mother Caroline is the daughter of a friend of his father Alphonse [*F* 19]. Caroline marries him after her father's early death, so she is much younger than her husband. Victor is the eldest of his brothers: he is an only child until age six [*F* 19], when his brother Ernest is born. When Victor turns seventeen, his youngest brother William is still an infant [*F* 24]. Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's cousin, is the only child close to his age. She joined the family when Victor was four, because her mother – Alphonse's sister – had died, and her father had remarried. Victor and Elizabeth grow up together, first as playmates, then as friends. His mother Caroline intends them to marry [*F* 19]. Victor's practice of calling his family his 'friends' perhaps results from the differences in age this accidental family embraces [*F* 147].[27]

Alphonse Frankenstein is old, and has put politics before family [*F* 18]. But now that his family is started, he has retired, to direct his children's education [*F* 19, 24]. He is thus the cause of the first accident to befall Victor. One rainy day, the thirteen year-old Victor finds a volume of Cornelius Agrippa, a sixteenth-century writer on alchemy and other subjects.[28] The theory of chemistry and the other "wonderful facts" he finds in its pages dazzle him. But when tells his father, Alphonse replies, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash" [*F* 21]. Had his father instead explained patiently how Agrippa's system had been refuted and replaced by a more rational and powerful modern chemistry, Victor thinks, he

would have thrown the book aside. Finding his father's judgment to be ignorant, he instead acquires and reads Agrippa's complete works, followed by those of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus [*F* 22].[29]

As Victor tells it, his father's carelessness gave his ideas "the fatal impulse that led to my ruin" and made natural philosophy "the genius that has regulated my fate" [*F* 21]. The projects of these authors – raising ghosts and devils, and finding the elixir of life [*F* 22] – become his projects, and emulation combines with "bright visions of extensive usefulness" [*F* 21] to power his studies. Books like Agrippa's appeal to him not only because they teach that materials have occult properties, but also because their teachings are esoteric, "treasures known to few besides myself" [*F* 22]. Their projects are private, but Victor's successes will be public: "what glory would attend the discovery," he fantasizes, "if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" [*F* 22].

Later events loosen Victor's attachment to his alchemical writers. He studies distillation, steam, the air-pump, and electricity, and his alchemical writers lose credit with him for their ignorance of these phenomena [*F* 22-23]. His father sends him to lectures on natural philosophy at the local school, but a second accident keeps Victor from all but the last few, and from understanding even these [*F* 23]. Victor's home schooling ends with him disgusted with natural philosophy, and occupied instead with mathematics, German, and Greek [*F* 23].[30] He does not learn a modern chemical system to replace that of his alchemical writers. Then, when he is about to leave for university at age seventeen, Victor's mother Caroline dies from a scarlet fever contracted from Elizabeth [*F* 24-25].[31] Losing his mother to death, "that most irreparable evil" [*F* 25], likely returned his thoughts to the alchemical pursuit of immortality.

A final accident befalls Victor when he arrives at the University of Ingolstadt.[32] Away from his family, alone in a "solitary apartment," unable to make new friends, he pursues his ardent desire for knowledge [*F* 26]. He makes only two new acquaintances outside his childhood circle: Professors Krempe and Waldman.[33] When Victor meets Krempe, and confesses his interest in alchemy, Krempe calls his reading "nonsense," and says he must begin his studies anew, since "these fancies… are a thousand years old" [*F* 26].[34] He fails to interest Victor in modern natural philosophy, however, because he says it means to annihilate the alchemists' visions of immortality and power – the very visions that interest Victor [*F* 27]. But when Victor meets Waldman, he shows no contempt for Agrippa, and defends the alchemists as the founders of modern philosophy. Charmed, Victor heeds Waldman's argument that modern science has traded the miraculous visions of alchemy for the "new and almost unlimited powers" promised by scientists like Harvey and Boyle [*F* 27-28]. Waldman defeats Victor's prejudice against modern chemistry, and Victor decides to study under Waldman and Krempe [*F* 28], The day he met these professors, Victor tells Walton, "decided my future destiny," since "natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry… became nearly my sole occupation" [*F* 29]. It did not hurt, Victor adds, that Waldman had a benevolent aspect and sweet voice, since it was also Krempe's "repulsive countenance" that deterred Victor from taking his advice [*F* 29 and 27]. Victor's sensitivity to beauty has terrible consequences when, at age nineteen [*F* 19] – nearly Mary Shelley's age when she begins to write *Frankenstein*[35] – he begins to build his monster.

The desire to end disease interests Victor in the principle of life, and in physiology, anatomy, and the causes of decay. An "almost supernatural enthusiasm" [*F* 30] drives his solitary studies, which require dissections and vivisections [*F* 32]. His enthusiasm is *almost* supernatural because his father was careful to keep supernatural horrors from entering the young

Victor's mind [*F* 30]. He is not averse to his work because he fears divine punishment. Instead, his aversion is natural: he finds his continual occupation with dead things to be ugly. But at last, after "examining and analyzing all the minutiæ of causation" involved in death and birth, he is suddenly enlightened [*F* 30].[36] He finds a secret reserved for him alone: "the cause of generation and life," which gives him the power of "bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" [*F* 30 and 32].[37]

Since his newfound power is general – he could animate a worm or a human being – Victor must decide how to use it. He resolves to animate a being like himself. Even if the result of his first try is not perfect, he reasons, like any other invention it could be the basis for future improvements [*F* 31]. The only constraint on his choice is practical: since working on minute parts will slow him down, he further resolves "to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large" [*F* 31 and 32; see also 13 and 65]. The reasons for his haste are not clear. Perhaps he fears that another will animate a lifeless being before he does – though the novel gives us no evidence that others are pursuing his project. To gather materials, Victor frequents "charnel houses," the "dissecting room," and the "slaughter-house" [*F* 32]. If he succeeds in animating his lifeless construct, he hopes that he might learn how to reanimate the dead – something as yet he cannot do [*F* 32].

Despite later depictions, this construct cannot be an assembly of corpse parts animated by electricity.[38] No human corpse could furnish proper parts – hands, feet, heart – proportionate to an eight-foot humanoid. If Victor cannot reanimate a dead human being, furthermore, he likely also cannot reanimate their proper parts. It is more likely that the monster is built out of homogeneous parts – bone, muscle, skin – harvested from human and animal corpses – hence the need to visit the slaughter-house – and shaped into proper parts proportionate to the whole. The

monster later tells Victor, "thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple" [*F* 66]. When he compares himself to humans, the monster judges, "I was more agile than they, and could subsist on coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded their's" [*F* 80; see also 89]. So Victor fails to make a being like himself; instead, he makes a being in many ways *better* than himself. He also intends this being to reproduce. Anticipating the completion of his project, he exults: "[a] new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's" [*F* 32].[39] Either Victor already plans to make his being a female companion, or he intends it to reproduce with human females. This mention of the gratitude he expects from his creations is the only thought he reports about their mental lives.[40]

Victor's concern with beauty extends to his creation. "His limbs were in proportion," he tells Walton, "and I had selected his features as beautiful" [*F* 34]. But as soon as he animates his being, his enthusiasm for his project dissipates, and he sees the monster as horribly ugly. Victor catalogs his "dull yellow eye," "watery [and] clouded," "his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips," and his "yellow skin [that] scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" [*F* 34; see also 126].[41] The problem is not just that Victor failed to harvest enough skin. The monster is ugly especially because of the contrast his ugly parts make with others that on their own are beautiful: his "hair… of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness" [*F* 34]. He is so ugly that, "unable to endure [his] aspect" [*F* 34], Victor abandons him almost at first sight. "I had gazed upon him while unfinished," Victor tells Walton; "he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" [*F* 35; see also 48]. Perhaps Victor hoped that

motion would beautify his monster's matter, making a 'he' out of an 'it,' rather than the reverse. Only after seeing him move does Victor first call his work 'monster' [*F* 35].

The monster's unintended ugliness is an image of Victor's enlightenment. His combination of marvelous alchemical projects and powerful modern techniques is stitched together with the hope that form and matter can be separated from one another, and so too beauty and life, and ugliness and death. He hopes to shape the ugly leavings of charnel houses, dissecting rooms, and slaughter-houses into a beautiful living being. But this hope is suggested by a truth of metabolism: by eating we make ourselves out of dead materials. Frankenstein's accidental reading makes for an accidental enlightenment, which makes an ugly monster, which will ruin Frankenstein's life.

Once the monster begins to move, Frankenstein begins to fall. He soon flees his laboratory. When he collects himself enough to return, the monster is gone [*F* 35 and 37].[42] He does not see the monster again until he returns home after his brother William's murder [*F* 48]; he does not speak with the monster until they are alone together later on the Alpine sea of ice [*F* 65]. Then, Frankenstein tries to kill his monster, presuming him guilty of William's murder [*F* 65-66 and 60].[43] But the monster persuades Frankenstein to hear his story, and to make him a female companion.

This new project does not rekindle Frankenstein's "almost supernatural enthusiasm" [*F* 30]. Instead, he is possessed by "a kind of insanity" that shows him "continually about me a multitude of filthy animals inflicting on me incessant torture" [*F* 101], as if he were undergoing, rather than conducting, his vivisections.[44] Collecting his materials, he tells Walton, "was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling on the head" [*F* 109]. Constructing the female monster is a "horrible and irksome task," a "filthy process." "During my first

experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment," he reports; "my mind was intently fixed on the sequel of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands" [*F* 113].[45]

Qualms about his promise accompany Frankenstein's disgust. It is "probable," he thinks, that a female monster will think and reason; but what will be her character? If the male monster became wicked, a female one "might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness" [*F* 114] – something, he implies, the male monster does not do. While the male monster swore to quit human society, a female one might not keep a promise made before her creation [*F* 114].[46] Even if she is good, a female monster might not provide the male the companionship he seeks. Frankenstein assumes she will turn out ugly; so the male monster might find his own ugliness more abhorrent in female form, while the female might turn from him in disgust to the superior beauty of man.[47] This fresh insult to the male monster might return him to human society [*F* 114]. But if the monsters can stand one another, their intercourse will quickly produce children; thus "a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" [*F* 114]. Without knowing exactly how his monsters reproduce,[48] we cannot know whether Frankenstein imagines a species terrifying for its ugliness, or its superiority, or both.

This last reflection shows Frankenstein the wickedness of his promise. Earlier he had dreamed of the blessings of mankind and of a new species [*F* 32]; now, he tells Walton, "I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race" [*F*

114-115 and 118]. Overcome by disgust and doubt, Frankenstein looks up from his gore-strewn workbench to see the monster watching him. The monster grins. Frankenstein sees in this only "malice and treachery," and tears the female monster to pieces [*F* 115; compare 35].

Once his Eve is destroyed, for the monster only the path of Satan remains. "I shall be with you on your wedding-night," he swears [*F* 116], and departs. Hearing this, Frankenstein also thinks of Adam and Eve: "the apple was already eaten, and the angel's arm bared to drive me from all hope" [*F* 131]. He expects to be banished from the paradise of marriage and family on the eve of his wedding to Elizabeth Lavenza; he expects to die then by the monster's hand. Instead, the monster first kills his friend Henry Clerval, then, on the wedding-night in question, Elizabeth herself. Soon after, Alphonse Frankenstein dies from sorrow [*F* 137]. Now Frankenstein too compares himself to Satan, "the archangel who aspired to omnipotence" [*F* 147]. The monster's reading has possessed Frankenstein as well. Revenge, he tells Walton, became "the devouring and only passion of my soul" [*F* 139]. Urged on by the monster, Frankenstein pursues him across Europe and north to the arctic sea of ice,[49] where Robert Walton first meets the monster and his shadow.

Part Three: The Enlightenment of Robert Walton

Enlightenment nearly makes Robert Walton a monster. After an accident kills his father while Walton is still a child, his uncle raises him. By neglecting his education, this uncle leaves Walton free for solitary readings of tales of discovery, the only books in his uncle's library. Young Walton loves above all tales of voyages to the Pacific over the North Pole. He reads them day and night. Poetry distracts him briefly from his youthful dreams of discovery, but then a second accident – inheriting a cousin's fortune – returns him to his projects of exploration, and

equips him to pursue them [*F* 8]. Walton does not say whether this second accident was his cousin's death. But death shapes his family and his education, as it did Frankenstein's.

Walton writes all this in letters to his sister, where he calls his self-education an evil. "Now I am twenty-eight, and in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen," he laments. "It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) *keeping*," or proportion [*F* 10]. Walton's circumstances, like Frankenstein's, have made him an imaginative and extravagant projector. But while Frankenstein had Clerval to regulate his mind, failed to confide in him, and lost him to his monster, Walton lacks such a friend, and feels this lack acutely [*F* 10 and 16].[50]

To Walton, the North Pole is "the region of beauty and delight" where "the sun is forever visible" [*F* 7] – a land of both literal and figurative enlightenment. "What may not be expected in a country of eternal light?" [*F* 7], he wonders: certainly new discoveries in geography and physics. "[Y]ou cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation," he writes his sister, "by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine" [*F* 8]. To these philanthropic ambitions Walton adds a personal one: to be the first human to reach the pole. "I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" [*F* 7]. Walton's public and private motives recall the combination that moved Frankenstein to pursue the principle of life.[51]

To pursue his project, Walton learns seamanship by day; by night, he studies mathematics, medicine, and the physical sciences of naval use. He inures his body to hardship.[52]

Then he travels to northern Russia, to a city named Archangel – he too is living in *Paradise Lost* – where he hires a ship, assembles a crew, and sails north into the sea of ice [*F* 8]. He reassures his sister by letter: "you know me sufficiently to confide in my prudence and considerateness wherever the safety of others is committed to my care" [*F* 11]. "I will not rashly encounter danger," Walton promises; "I will be cool, persevering, and prudent" [*F* 12]. Despite his promise, many of his men will die [*F* 149].

Walton is also ready to risk his own life. His sister will be happy, even if he dies in the north, because she has a husband and "lovely children" [*F* 148]. Walton himself does not want a family, but a friend. With no one to share his joy at success, to temper his dejection at failure, to amend his faults, to supply proportion to his projects, when a third accident crosses his path with the monster's and Frankenstein's, and he takes the latter aboard, he is eager to regard Frankenstein as a friend. As Walton tells his sister, "I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart" [*F* 15].

Though Frankenstein approves of Walton's desire, he declines to reciprocate, explaining, "I have lost every thing, and cannot begin life anew" [*F* 16; see also 147]. Yet Frankenstein does call Walton "my friend" [*F* 17], he helps him by suggesting useful improvements to his plan, and he rallies his sailors when their fear of death makes them demand that Walton sail for home [*F* 149].[53] But the chief help he gives Walton is to tell his story. "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did," he says, "and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been" [*F* 17]. His story will provide Walton "a view of nature, which may enlarge your faculties and understanding," concerning "powers and occurrences, such as you have been accustomed to believe impossible" [*F* 17].[54] When Walton

presses Frankenstein to share the secret of the monster's animation, Frankenstein rebuffs Walton for his "senseless curiosity."[55] "[L]earn my miseries," Frankenstein tells him, "and do not seek to increase your own" [*F* 146]. His tale completed, Frankenstein corrects and augments Walton's notes, especially of his conversations with the monster, and shows him Felix and Safie's letters, received from the hand of the monster himself [*F* 146; see also 83].[56]

Perhaps Frankenstein's final hope is to win glory and benefit mankind by making his story public. But the meaning of his story is ambiguous. Walton, for example, does not learn from him to give up on enlightenment, perhaps because of Frankenstein's conclusion. "During these last days," he says, "I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable" [*F* 151]. He does implore Walton to "[s]eek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even… the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries" [*F* 152]. But then he recants: "[y]et why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" [*F* 151].

'Succeed' is Victor's last word, one worthy of his name. His last request is that Walton catch and kill the monster, though he does not insist that Walton do so at the cost of his ship and crew. But Walton turns home. So did Victor succeed or fail? Even after hearing Frankenstein's story, Walton tells his sister, "I had rather die, than return shamefully, – my purpose unfulfilled" [*F* 150]. Frankenstein's last words do not change his mind. Instead, his crew compels Walton to return.[57] Nor does he fulfill Frankenstein's last request, though he has his chance when the monster boards his ship to see Frankenstein's corpse. "Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness" [*F* 152], Walton writes his sister; but despite the monster's ugliness Walton listens to him, and seems persuaded by his promise: "I shall… seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and

consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been" [*F* 155]. The monster means to extinguish his light at the pole, by becoming a light at the pole. Not the monster's ugliness but Frankenstein's corpse angers Walton [*F* 154]. He lets the monster escape without trying to kill him [*F* 156]. Walton does not kill the monster, nor does he kill himself and his crew in his quest for the pole. But only the rebellion of his crew spares him the latter.[58] Maybe the monster finds the pole in his place.

Part Four: The Enlightenment of Mary Shelley

Did enlightenment make Mary Shelley a monster? She pursued it with a vengeance. As the daughter of two famous writers, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and the lover and later wife of a third, Percy Shelley, she set herself an intense program of reading and writing, beginning at age seventeen, if not earlier. Starting with biographies, novels, and her parents' books, later adding history and philosophy, she recorded each book she and Percy read, day by day and year by year, in her journal. Thirty-six books in the latter half of 1814, seventy-four in 1815, sixty-five in 1816, seventy-one in 1817 – all told she read well more than two hundred books in her late teens and early twenties, in the four years preceding the publication of *Frankenstein*.[59] She read the *Iliad*, the Bible, the *Aeneid*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Tacitus' *Annals*, the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's plays, *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost* – twice – and *Gulliver's Travels* [*J* 48-49, 73, and 89-90]. Here is a typical journal entry, from Saturday, November 17, 1816: "Draw, write; read Locke and Curtius. [Percy] Shelley reads Plutarch and Locke; he reads "Paradise Lost" aloud in the evening. I work" [*J* 68]. At this point Mary's second child is eleven months old [*F* 333].

Shelley herself tells us that *Frankenstein* is a warning about the dangers posed by science and technology, ambitious philanthropy, and especially 'playing god.' In her preface to the third, 1831 edition of the novel, she writes of Frankenstein's success in animating his monster, "supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" [*F* 172]. But in the first, 1818 edition, the supremely frightful thing is the monster's ugliness. Perhaps marking this shift in emphasis, the frontispiece of the 1831 edition depicts a monster who, though goggling at his reflection in a mirror, looks positively beautiful. No character in the novel means to 'play god,' nor displays a lasting concern with doing so. Frankenstein and his monster mostly see themselves as Adam or as Satan. Theological claims that god's providence is better than man's, or that imitating his providence is hubris or sin, are notably absent.

Instead, *Frankenstein* is more secular, personal, even autobiographical than Shelley's 1831 preface suggests. Its foreground concerns are with the monster's ugliness, the perils of solitary reading, the mundane risks of philanthropic ambition, the loss of the family, and the meaning of nature. The novel is a *Paradise Lost* without God, a *Prometheus Bound* without Zeus. The monster, Frankenstein, and Walton are all shadows of Shelley herself,[60] and they repeat the novel's fundamental question: is enlightenment good, or does it make us ugly monsters, cut off from family and nature?

We have plenty of evidence that Shelley finds enlightenment to be costly. Take the monster: he is attracted to family life and sensitive to the beauties of nature, but his extreme ugliness cuts him off from both [*F* 77]. Were it not for his enlightenment, especially by *Paradise Lost*, he might have seen a possibility for his life other than retirement with a mate, or war with his maker. Solitary contemplation, masked social activity in person or in writing,[61] and

scientific inquiry do not occur to him. He does not consider a life of exploration, though his build would suit him, more than any other reasoning being, to such a life. Though he may be smarter than his maker, he does not build a wife or a child for himself. Take Frankenstein: he is also attracted to and suited to family and nature. But his enlightenment, at the hands of the alchemists and the modern chemists, makes him an ugly monster, and cuts him off from family and nature [*F* 43-44], before dragging him to death across the sea of ice. And take Walton: he longs for and is suited to friendship, if not to family, but his enlightenment through books about voyages of discovery has sent him and his crew to risk their lives at the edge of the world. These three neglect the rule Frankenstein proposes to Walton: if your study "has the tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind" [*F* 33].[62] Percy Shelley, writing as the anonymous author, endorses this rule in his preface, claiming that the chief concern of the novel is "limited to the avoiding [*sic*] the enervating effects of the novels of the present day,[63] and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue" [*F* 5-6]. At the book's center is a family of the good, the happy, and the wise – but the monster scares them away and burns down their home.

Still, we have Frankenstein's first name, Victor, and his last words, "another may succeed" [*F* 152]; we have Walton, the audience of the story we are reading, who is deflected from the pole not by Frankenstein's tale, nor by Frankenstein's death, nor by his own interview with the monster, but by the near-mutiny of his sailors. Perhaps had he and his sailors all been monsters, he would have succeeded. Perhaps these details indicate that Shelley herself doubted "the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue." Perhaps

enlightenment shows us the truth about the family and nature, by showing us the extent to which death and chance, not life and providence, makes our families, nature, and us. Perhaps enlightenment reveals our world not as an amiable home, but as monstrous.[64] When Frankenstein, hiking alone in the Alps, considers the "awful majesty" of the mountains, the "wonderful and stupendous scene" of the "sea, or rather the vast river of ice," he calls out to the "[w]andering spirits" of the place. The spirit that answers his call is the monster [*F* 65 and 77].

Another lie Percy Shelly tells in his preface is, "[t]he opinions which naturally spring from the character and situation of the hero are by no means to be conceived as existing always in my own conviction; nor is any inference to be drawn from the following pages as prejudicing any philosophical doctrine of whatever kind" [*F* 6]. He, and perhaps Shelley herself, could fear a reader's inference of prejudice against the theological doctrine of Milton, given the damage *Paradise Lost* does to Frankenstein, and above all to his monster. But a philosophical doctrine is also being judged throughout the novel, even though its author's name is not mentioned. Consider: Victor Frankenstein is a Genevan who makes a "man born big and strong" [*CW* 13: 162, see also 189-190], but fails to educate him adequately. This being is born into a state of nature, and perfected by circumstances; he claims that he was naturally good, but society has made him wicked; he begins life as a savage, is mistaken for a savage [*F* 13], and wishes to end his life living as a savage with his mate in South America [*F* 99]. Consider further: in Shelley's time, the park outside Geneva where the monster murders William and frames Justine featured an obelisk dedicated to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, before which the Genevans murdered their magistrates during the Revolution.[65] Rousseau depicts himself as a modern Prometheus in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, the first public writing of his philosophic career [*CW* 2: 2 and 179]. In *Emile*, his best and most important work [*CW* 5: 480], he mentions "another

Prometheus" who had made a tiny man "by the science of alchemy" [*CW* 13: 436 note *].[66] Rousseau claims in his *Confessions* to have abandoned five children to a foundling hospital [*CW* 5: 289, 299-301, 551-552], where they likely died. Later in life, when Shelley writes an encyclopedia article on Rousseau, she returns repeatedly to the subject of these children [*F* 545].[67] But the monster claims five victims before Frankenstein himself: William, Justine Moritz, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza, and Alphonse Frankenstein. The amiableness of domestic affection, the excellence of universal virtue, and the beauty of nature are themes of Rousseau's novel *Julie, or the New Héloïse*. Lastly, among the more than two hundred books that Mary Shelley read in the four years before *Frankenstein* was published are Rousseau's *Confessions, Emile, Julie*, and *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* – and she read all but the last of these twice [*J* 47-49, 55, 64, 72-73, 85-86, 89-90].[68]

Frankenstein is thus a meditation on the doctrine of the modern philosopher who launched his career by questioning the goodness of enlightenment. Rousseau defended the amiableness of domestic affection, but abandoned his children. He lauded the excellence of universal virtue, but sparked the Revolution. "I have seen these contradictions," Rousseau writes about his claims in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, "and they have not rebuffed me" [*CW* 2: 4]. Nor is Mary Shelley rebuffed. The ambiguities of her "hideous progeny" suggest she is willing to pay the price of enlightenment. She pronounces her judgment in the voice of Frankenstein's creation: "[w]e shall be monsters."

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Annapolis, Maryland
February 23, 2018

Leftover Materials

This lecture is dedicated to my father, Paul David Black. It was delivered on his birthday, March 2, 2018, at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Thanks to Michael W. Grenke for the invitation to give this lecture. Thanks to the members of the 2016-2017 Mellon Study Group on Digital Technology for a galvanizing first discussion of the themes of *Frankenstein*. Thanks to Lise van Boxel and Brian Wilson, founding members of the Combat & Classics podcast team, for an animating discussion of the ideas in the lecture. Thanks to my sister, Katherine Melissa Watson, for her helpful comments on an earlier draft.

The engraving on the lecture's cover page is Theodore von Holst's, and was the frontispiece to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*. See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frontispiece_to_Frankenstein_1831.jpg. Retrieved on February 15, 2018.

[1] Citations in the text of this lecture follow these conventions: *CW* refers to volume and page numbers in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*. Edited by Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters. Thirteen Volumes. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990-2010). *F* refers to page numbers in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Edited by J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), which contains the 1818 text. *FN* refers to part and page numbers in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Frankenstein Notebooks*. Volume IX of Shelley's Manuscripts, Two Parts. Edited by Charles E. Robinson. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996). *J* refers to page numbers in Mary Shelley, *Mary Shelley's Journal*. Edited by Frederick L. Jones. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947). *L* refers to volume and page numbers in Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*. Edited by Betty T. Bennett. Three Volumes. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). *PL* refers to book and line numbers of *Paradise Lost*, in the edition John Milton, *Paradise Lost*. Second Edition. Edited by Scott Elledge. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).

[2] In calling Frankenstein's product a 'monster,' I am following both Frankenstein's practice and the monster's own. They each give reasons for using this term. They mean by it something so unprecedented in its deformity as to serve as a warning.

[3] He says, "it presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandæmonium appeared to the dæmons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire" [*F* 70; see *PL* 1:710-730].

[4] "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" [*F* 76].

[5] The monster does taste the offal left behind by the travelers who abandoned their fire, finding it "much more savoury than the berries I gathered from the trees" [*F* 69]. But he apparently does not begin eating meat because of this experience. In the only case where he kills for food, he does so to feed Frankenstein [*F* 142]. See also Marilyn Butler, "*Frankenstein* and Radical Science" [*F* 311]. Since the monster was not born and did not grow, it is not entirely clear why he needs to eat. But Rousseau would endorse his vegetarianism [*CW* 13: 184-186 and 297-299], which might be obscurely connected with his construction: since he is made out of dead flesh, perhaps he does not want to add to his substance by consuming dead flesh.

[6] Constantin François Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney, *Les Ruines, ou Meditations sur les Revolutions des Empires*, 1791. Published in English as Constantin-François Chasseboeuf, Marquis de Volney, *The Ruins: or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*. Third Edition. London: J. Johnson, 1796. It is available in the Liberty Fund's Online Library of Liberty at http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1706. Retrieved on February 2, 2018. There is no record in her journal of Mary Shelley having read this work.

[7] The connection between sex and a woman named Sophie is a theme of Book Five of Rousseau's *Emile*.

[8] Prior to relating this accident, the monster tells Frankenstein the history of his cottagers, which "could not fail to impress itself deeply" on his mind [*F* 81]. This is so much that case that the monster makes copies of letters Safie exchanged with Felix, letters which testify to the truth of their story, in order to offer them to Frankenstein to "prove the truth of my tale" [*F* 83]. Yet it is not clear what the monster learns from the history of the cottagers that is different from what he learns from Safie and Felix's readings and discussion of Volney. Perhaps the former history teaches the same lessons as the latter, but is more striking because the monster can see the participants in the flesh.

[9] When suicide later occurs to the monster as an alternative to demanding a mate from Frankenstein or taking revenge on him, he rules it out, claiming that life is dear to him, despite his misery [*F* 66]. Yet once it is clear he will not have a companion, and once Frankenstein is dead, the monster claims that he will commit suicide [*F* 155].

[10] One new element appears in these reflections after reading *Werther*: the monster tries to infer his origin and purpose from his physical constitution. "My person was hideous," he reflects, "and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them" [*F* 86]. So far as I can tell, the monster makes no progress in this new line of inquiry. It seems that his other readings closed off this line of thinking for him.

[11] Here we see the damage done by Frankenstein's abandonment of the monster. Had he overcome his disgust and stayed to educate his product, Frankenstein might have imbued the monster with scientific and philanthropic ambitions.

[12] This contrast is the basis of the only joke I have found in *Frankenstein*. When the monster confronts Victor Frankenstein to tell his story, he repeatedly demands that Frankenstein listen to him [*F* 66-67], likely because he knows that his speech is more attractive than his looks. Frankenstein responds, "relieve me from the sight of your detested form" [*F* 67]. "Thus I relieve thee, my creator," the monster intones, while placing his massive hands in front of Frankenstein's eyes. Enraged, Frankenstein flings them away. This was not the time for a joke.

[13] The monster's halfheartedness in seeking revenge is suggested by several details. He tells Frankenstein he could have torn Felix "limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope" [*F* 91], or destroyed the cottage and the cottagers, glutting himself "with their shrieks and misery" [*F* 92] – but he does neither of these things, though he could have. In addition, consider this episode that occurs on the road to Geneva. On an especially fine spring day, he sees a young girl fall in a river, and leaps in to save her from drowning. He is trying to revive her when one of the locals approaches him and snatches the child away. When the monster tries to follow, the man shoots him with his gun [*F* 95]. This bald ingratitude makes the monster renew his vow of "eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" [*F* 96], but even this renewed vow does not prevent the monster from imagining that he might befriend William Frankenstein when he first encounters him in Geneva.

[14] The story of Justine Moritz's fate includes an anticipation of the question the monster means his story to answer. Ernest Frankenstein, the elder of Victor's two younger brothers, asks "who would credit that Justine Moritz, who was so amiable, and fond of all the family, could all at once become so extremely wicked?" [*F* 50; see also 54-55]. No one should credit such a miraculous change, though, since Justine is not guilty of the murder for which she is accused. But Justine is beautiful [*F* 52]. The monster, who is ugly, *is* guilty of the murder; the question becomes how he, being benevolent and fond of all his cottagers, could become so extremely wicked. Reflecting on Justine Moritz's execution, Elizabeth Lavenza says, "men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood" [*F* 61].

[15] In the immediate sequel the monster asserts to Frankenstein that "the human senses are insurmountable barriers" to any sort of union between the monster and a human being [*F* 98].

[16] In the end Frankenstein does not comply, and the monster only kills members of his family. So it seems that his threat to kill "thousands of others" was a bluff or an exaggeration.

[17] "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" [*F* 66].

[18] Frankenstein asks, "did I not, as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?" [*F* 99]. We might wonder, since some of us are makers of children, to what extent this rhetorical question should be answered in the affirmative.

[19] "Our lives will not be happy," the monster continues, "but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel" [*F* 99]. If the monster is not content with harmlessness, and seeks happiness as well, then he will be drawn back to human society.

[20] Shelley would have been familiar with the argument that links solitude with wickedness through the dispute between Rousseau and Diderot communicated by a footnote in *Emile*. Against this link, Rousseau writes,

> The precept of never hurting another carries with it that of being attached to human society as little as possible, for in the social state the good of one necessarily constitutes the harm of another. This relation is in the essence of the thing, and nothing can change it. On the basis of this principle, let one investigate who is the better: the social man or the solitary man. An illustrious author [Diderot] says it is only the wicked man who is alone. I say that it is only the good man who is alone. If this proposition is less sententious, it is truer and better reasoned than the former one. If the wicked man were alone, what harm would he do? It is in society that he sets up his devices for hurting others [*CW* 13:240 note *].

[21] Seeing Frankenstein destroy the inanimate body of his companion, the monster says, "You can blast my other passions; but revenge remains – revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food!" [*F* 116].

[22] "My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded" [*F* 100].

[23] The two monsters "might even hate each other," Frankenstein muses; "the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species" [*F* 114].

[24] Indeed, the monster demands that his mate be "as hideous as myself" because "once as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects" [*F* 99, 97]. He gives no other indication of why he thinks the effects of his own ugliness can be overcome. His thought seems to be either that two solitary and isolated members of the same species will feel compelled to unite [*F* see 99], despite their ugliness, or that because his mate will have been created particularly for him, they will be connected in a way that overcomes the effects of their ugliness. The former thought seems naïve, while the latter thought depends on the monster's identification with Adam.

[25] After the monster recounts his failed attempt to reveal himself to his cottagers, he says, "I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me" [*F* 92]. See *PL* 4:73-75.

[26] To be ugly is to have bad looks, to be dis-specied, without species. See Plato, *Sophist*, 228a.

[27] One wonders whether it is the difference in age between Alphonse and Caroline Frankenstein, and the youthful acquaintance of Victor Frankenstein and Elizabeth Lavenza, that explains how unerotic these relationships are – or whether this simply should be attributed to authorial discretion. The lack of *eros* between these partners might also contribute to Victor Frankenstein's easy elision between his family and his friends. The reason for this elision is that friends who are not family cannot be true friends. "Even where the affections are not moved by any superior excellence, the companions of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds, which hardly any later friend can obtain," Victor explains. "They know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated; and they can judge of our actions with more certain conclusions as to the integrity of our motives. A sister or a brother can never, unless indeed such symptoms have been shown early, suspect the other of fraud or false dealing, when another friend, however strongly he may be attached, may, in spite of himselF be invaded with suspicion" [*F* 147]. Alphonse Frankenstein delicately mentions his romantic coolness to Victor when the latter postpones his marriage to Elizabeth Lavenza: "You, perhaps, regard her as your sister, without any wish that she might become your wife" [*F* 104]. Elizabeth sees no difficulty in this arrangement: "our union has been the favorite plan of your parents ever since our infancy. We were told this while young, and taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take place" [*F* 130]. The coolness of the connection between Victor and Elizabeth might explain why Victor does not realize that the monster's threat, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night," is

directed against Elizabeth, rather than against himself – as his reply, "before you sign my death-warrant, be sure you are yourself safe" [*F* 116] indicates. Victor seems to lack self-knowledge when he later says, "if for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself for ever from my native country, and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth, than have consented to this miserable marriage. But, as if possessed of magic powers, the monster had blinded me to his real intentions" [*F* 133].

[28] The editors of the Norton Critical Edition of *Frankenstein* supply here "Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), German physician, author of *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531), and reputed magician" [*F* 21 note 6]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy adds that *Three Books on Occult Philosophy* (1510 and, reworked and enlarged, 1533) is "a comprehensive treatise on magic and occult arts," and that Agrippa was also known for *On the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Arts and Sciences: An Invective Declamation*, "a rigorous refutation of all products of human reason." See https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agrippa-nettesheim. Retrieved on February 2, 2018. Is it a coincidence that Agrippa's other major work resembles, in its title at least, the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*? Is Agrippa a stand-in for Rousseau?

[29] Paracelsus (1493-1541) was, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, a German-Swiss physician and alchemist who established the role of chemistry in medicine. See https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paracelsus. Retrieved on February 4, 2018. Consider also *CW* 13: 436-437. According to the same source, Albertus Magnus was a teacher of Thomas Aquinas and a proponent of Aristotle who established the legitimacy of the study of nature for Christians. See https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Albertus-Magnus. Retrieved on February 4, 2018.

[30] Though his disgust is not so great as to prevent him from studying Pliny and Buffon at this point [*F* 23]. Victor also learned Latin and English when he was much younger [*F* 20].

[31] Louis Pasteur did not succeed in spreading the germ theory of disease until the 1870's. *Frankenstein* is set sometime in the eighteenth century. See https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Pasteur/Vaccine-development. Retrieved on February 16, 2018.

[32] Shelley may have chosen Ingolstadt for Victor Frankenstein's education because the secret society of the Illuminati was founded at this university in 1776 [*F* 24 n 1].

[33] This childhood circle includes Victor's friend, Henry Clerval [*F* 21], who later studies with him at Ingolstadt [*F* 36], and ends by being murdered by the monster [*F* 122]. There is not enough time in this lecture to treat Clerval in detail, let alone Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's other companion from childhood [*F* 26]. But it is worth nothing that, even though Shelley presents Clerval's favored subjects as a kind of antithesis and antidote to Victor's reading [*F* 44] – Clerval recalls Victor to his friends, his family, and his love of nature [*F* 43-44] – Victor is quite familiar with the kind of works Clerval reads [*F* 15-16, 31, 35-36, 101, 107-108, 143, 146-147], and this familiarity on its own is not enough to deflect him from his path.

[34] Krempe seems to be tracing the projects of the alchemists back to the eighth century, whereas the writings he is criticizing date from the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. It's not clear to me why he does this.

[35] Mary Shelley was born on 30 August 1797, and began writing *Frankenstein* sometime in June 1816 [*FN lxxvi* and *lxxviii*].

[36] Compare Rousseau's account of his sudden illumination on the road to Vincennes in the second of his *Letters to Malesherbes* [*CW* 5: 575-576].

[37] Almost immediately, Frankenstein tells Walton, he forgot the steps that showed him the cause, but retained the power [*F* 31]. It is puzzling that Frankenstein does not use this detail as an excuse when Walton asks him later for the secret of the monster's animation [*F* 146].

[38] Shelley's claim that Frankenstein uses his "instruments of life" to "infuse a spark of being" into the monster [*F* 34] may be metaphorical, since there is no other reference to electricity in the account of the monster's animation.

[39] The mention of the gratitude due to a father in this passage could give the impression that Victor intends to supplant the role of the mother in generation, and to claim the gratitude that is her due. While there is something to

this reading, I am more struck by the contrast between the mention of the father in this sentence and the mention of the creator in the previous sentence. To say nothing about the pagan gods, the Hebrew one has already twice supplanted the role of the mother in generation. Most striking, however, are the reflections Victor's exultation encourages about gratitude. Compare Rousseau's reflections on gratitude in Book IV of *Emile* [*CW* 13: 387-388].

[40] Victor later admits to himself that he "thoughtlessly" bestowed life on the monster [*F* 60].

[41] The lack of skin also argues for the theory that the monster is not an assemblage of proper parts, taken from corpses. Each of these parts would have had skin of its own, and more than enough, had they been harvested as wholes.

[42] As he sleeps after animating the monster, but before his flight, Victor has a horrible dream:

> I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel [*F* 34].

Not only does this dream depict the thought that we are all made of dead materials, and so in a sense dead things, but it connects this interpretation of metabolism and growth with sex and generation.

[43] Frankenstein infers the monster's guilt directly from his ugliness. Seeing a figure in the trees, he says, "its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy dæmon to whom I had given life. Could he be," Frankenstein asks, "the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth… […] Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. […] The mere presence of the idea," he concludes, "was an irresistible proof of the fact" [*F* 48].

[44] Frankenstein realizes that he cannot create a female monster without "again devoting several months to profound study and laborious disquisition" [*F* 103]. In particular, "I had heard of some discoveries having been made by an English philosopher, the knowledge of which was material to my success" [*F* 103]. Since it is hard to imagine that Frankenstein needs additional anatomical information, which he acquires in any case through direct experimentation, this comment might indicate that he has, reasonably, started to think about the moral formation of a female monster. Perhaps the English philosopher Frankenstein has in mind is Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and Mary Shelley's mother. This would also explain why he puts such weight on the uncertain character of a female monster in his ultimate decision to destroy his second creation. However this may be, Frankenstein's need for additional study is another indication that he might not have planned from the beginning to make a female monster, perhaps because he intended his monster to interbreed with human women.

[45] Even cleaning up the aftermath of his interrupted work is sickening to Frankenstein. "The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" [*F* 118].

[46] Frankenstein thus anticipates a problem that arises in *Paradise Lost*: Adam is prohibited from eating from the tree of knowledge before Eve is created. She does not hear the prohibition directly, but from Adam; this inclines her less to obey it. See *PL* 8:323-333 and 9:758-760. We will soon see that Frankenstein too seems to have read Milton's epic poem [*F* 131 and 147]. He does not voice, but presumably could have anticipated, a similar but greater problem regarding the monsters' offspring, whom the monster has said nothing to bind.

[47] Perhaps this also indicates that, if Frankenstein makes his monsters capable of reproduction with one another, he also makes them capable of reproduction with human beings.

[48] Frankenstein's fears are another indication that he does not manufacture his monsters from the proper parts of corpses. If they were assemblages of corpse parts, would not their offspring be human?

[49] The monster encourages Frankenstein to pursue him in order to draw out his revenge. As Frankenstein tells it, "sometimes he himselF who feared that if I lost all trace I should despair and die, often left some mark to guide me" [*F* 141]. Oddly, Victor adds, "yet still a spirit of good followed and directed my steps, and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes, when nature overcome by hunger, sunk under exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspirited me… I may not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me" [*F* 141]. Since the monster occasionally leaves food for Frankenstein [*F* 142], it seems likely that he is also responsible for the activities of Frankenstein's 'spirits of good.' Frankenstein's meeting with the monster on the alpine glacier is preceded by his invocation of "Wandering spirits" [*F* 65].

[50] As Walton tells his sister, "I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavor to regulate my mind" [*F* 10]. Later, he adds that his desire for friendship is "one want I have never yet been able to satisfy, and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil" [*F* 10; see also 16],

[51] Walton asks his sister: "do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose. My life might have been passed in ease and luxury; but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path" [*F* 9].

[52] Frankenstein also claims to have superior physical endurance: "I had ever inured myself to rain, moisture, and cold" [*F* 63]. But there is some reason to doubt this: he is forever swooning, for example, or struggling with madness [*F* 37 and 122]. In his superior endurance Walton more resembles the monster; the same resemblance can be found in their respective longings for a companion. Walton may be a chimera of Frankenstein and his monster.

[53] "Are you then so easily turned from your design? Did you not call this a glorious expedition?" Frankenstein asks them. "You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your name adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour and the benefit of mankind. […] Oh, be men, or be more than men" [*F* 149]. Frankenstein himself has encountered death for glory and the benefit of mankind; he has been a man and made more than a man; and he has suffered greatly for it. It is striking that he is willing to repeat an appeal that has cost him so much to heed.

[54] If the monster is the gratification of Frankenstein's wishes, then by calling him a "serpent" here Frankenstein anticipates the later moment when, certain he will not receive a mate from Frankenstein, the monster compares himself to a "snake" [*F* 116]. The image is Biblical, if it is not once again from *Paradise Lost*.

[55] This is odd, since in his story Frankenstein claims to forget "all the steps" that "progressively led" to his discovery, and to be left with "only the result" [*F* 31]. He clearly thinks he can continue to animate dead matter, since otherwise he would have begged his incapacity in reply to the monster's demand for a mate. But can he teach this power to others?

[56] Walton says, "the letters of Felix and Safie, which he shewed me, and the apparition of the monster, seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected" [*F* 146].

[57] Nor can we say he is secretly relieved by their compulsion. He writes to his sister, "The die is cast; I have consented to return, if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess, to bear this injustice with patience" [*F* 150].

[58] In an early letter to his sister Walton considers the possibility that he might find a friend among his crew. "My lieutenant," he writes, "is a man of wonderful courage and enterprise; he is madly desirous of glory. He is an Englishman, and in the midst of national and professional prejudices, unsoftened by cultivation, retains some of the noblest endowments of humanity" [*F* 10]. Walton also tells his sister a lengthy story about the heroic generosity of his master, but adds, "he has passed all his life on board a vessel, and has scarcely an idea beyond the rope and the shroud" [*F* 11]. Walton concludes, "I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen" [*F* 10]. His crew is thus composed not of family nor of friends, but of associates made necessary by Walton's inability to reach the pole alone.

[59] Since Shelley read a few of these books twice during this period, and since she sometimes gives several works a single entry in her journal – for example, "Shakespeare's Plays" – this is only a rough count [*J* 32-33, 47-49, 71-73, 88-90].

[60] The defect mentioned by at least one modern critic, that the novel's three major characters all sound the same, is thus not a bug but a feature, an indication that they are repetitions of the same person. See Germaine Greer, "Yes, Frankenstein really was written by Mary Shelley. It's obvious – because the book is so bad," *The Guardian*. April 9, 2007. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/09/gender.books. Retrieved on February 4, 2018. Greer complains, "There are three narrators: Thomas Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the monster himself. The three of them, including the inarticulate monster, speak in paragraphs, with the same tendency to proliferating parallel clauses and phrases and the occasional theatrical ejaculation." It's not clear why Greer thinks that the monster is, or should be, inarticulate.

[61] "It seems that all great things," Nietzsche tells us in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "in order to inscribe themselves with eternal demands upon the heart of humanity, must first stalk the earth as colossal and fear-inducing masks" [Preface, see also Sections 25 and 40]. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil / On The Genealogy of Morality*. Translated, with an Afterword, by Adrian Del Caro. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014). Even if the fear and disgust the monster inspires are natural rather than learned, it does not follow that his ugliness expresses the truth about his interior, nor that his ugliness is a disability. Since the monster's vengeful path is ultimately due to his accidental reading, since he was born good but was made wicked by society, Shelley can refer to *Frankenstein* in one of her letters as "a book in ~~favor~~ defence of Polypheme" [*L* I: 91].

[62] "If this rule were always observed," Frankenstein continues, "if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed" [*F*, 33].

[63] Rousseau discusses the arguments for and against novels in the dialogue that serves as the Second Preface of *Julie* [*CW* 6: 7-22].

[64] In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant asks us to

> consider bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling high up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightning and thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean heaved up, the high waterfall of a mighty river, and so on. Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle. Yet the sight of them becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, provided we are in a safe place. And we like to call these objects sublime because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence [*Ak.* 261].

Note that the ability and the courage Kant mentions in this passage are not dependent on our safety from nature. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Translated, with an Introduction, by Werner S. Pluhar. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 120.

[65] In a letter to Fanny Imlay, Mary Shelley describes the promenade of Plainpalais, outside of Geneva:

> Here a small obelisk is erected to the glory of Rousseau, and here (such is the mutability of human life) the magistrates, the successors of those who exiled him from his native country, were shot by the populace during that revolution, which his writings mainly contributed to mature, and which, notwithstanding the temporary bloodshed and injustice with which it was polluted, has produced enduring benefits to mankind, which all the chicanery of statesmen, nor even the great conspiracy of kings, can entirely render vain [*F* 174 or *L* I: 20].

[66] "Would anyone believe, if he did not have the proof," Rousseau writes in the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,

> that human foolishness could have been brought to this point? Amatus Lusitanus affirmed that he had seen a little man an inch long, closed up in a bottle, whom Julius Camillus, like another Prometheus, had made by the science of alchemy. Paracelsus, *De natura rerum*, teaches the way to produce these little men and maintains that the pygmies, the fauns, the satyrs, and the nymphs were engendered by chemistry, Indeed, I do not see anything that further remains to be done to establish the possibility of these facts, other than to advance that organic matter resists the heat of fire and that its molecules can be preserved alive in a reverberatory furnace " [CW 13:436-437 note *].

What would Rousseau have his Vicar say if the alleged generation did not require the use of fire?

[67] For more on Shelley's concern with this matter, see James O'Rourke, "'Nothing More Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau," in *ELH*. Volume 56, Number 3. (Autumn, 1989), reprinted in in *F*, 543-569. O'Rourke quotes from Shelley's 1838 encyclopedia essay on Rousseau:

> Our first duty is to render those to whom we give birth, wise, virtuous, and happy, as far as in us lies. Rousseau failed in this, – can we wonder that his after course was replete with sorrow? The distortion of intellect that blinded him to the first duties of life, we are inclined to believe to be allied to that vein of insanity, that made him an example among men for self-inflicted sufferings [*F*, 547].

[68] It is difficult to be sure exactly what Shelley read of Rousseau in the years before the publication of *Frankenstein*, mostly because she does not name Rousseau's works consistently in her journal. In 1815 she records reading Rousseau's *Confessions*, *Emile*, and *Nouvelle Heloise* [*J*, 47-49]. In 1816 she adds Rousseau's *Reveries*, over four days in late July and early August [*J*, 55]. She was writing *Frankenstein* at this point, having begun in June [*F*, 333]. She also reads something she calls the "Letters of Emile" over two days in September 1816 [*J*, 64]: could this refer to *Emile and Sophie*? In the summary of her reading for that year, she repeats these titles, listing the *Reveries* and the "Letters of Emile" [*J*, 72-73]. Shelley turned to correcting and transcribing *Frankenstein* in April, May, and October 1817 [*J*, 78-79, 85]. Over six days in late June and early July 1817, she records re-reading Rousseau's *Julie*, having completed *Frankenstein* in May that year [*F*, 334]. She re-reads the *Confessions* over three days in October 1817, followed by three days on something she calls "Rousseau's Letters" – perhaps those referred to in the *Confessions*, which would have included the April 20, 1751 letter to Mme. de Francueil where Rousseau discusses his treatment of his children [*CW* 5: 551-552; *J*, 85-86]. She lists the *Nouvelle Heloise* and "*Confessions et Lettres de Rousseau*" in her reading for 1817 [*J*, 89-90].